Fifty years after the Asia-Africa Conference was held in Bandung in April 1955 the ‘Spirit of Bandung’ continues to be redeployed and rediscovered, attributed to gatherings as diverse as the World Conference Against Racism,1 the World Social Forum (WSF), and the Asian–African Sub-Regional Organizations Conference (AASROC), whose preparations for the celebration of the 50th anniversary were seen as a coordinated response to globalization by marginalized states.2 Indeed, this ‘Spirit of Bandung’ is deemed more relevant than ever by Left nationalists, pan-Asianists and ‘Third Worldists’ seeking to restore or reinvigorate a unified front against US-led globalization and/or US imperialism.3 The powerful and very public condemnation of imperialism and racism by nationalist ‘Third World’ leaders at the Bandung Conference is, it seems, the kind of political response needed today. The perceived radicalism of Bandung – bolstered by the CIA’s attempts to disrupt what it saw as ‘an impending Communist Conference in 1955’4 through political assassination – has been written into the history of ‘Third World’ opposition to US imperialism. But in reviving the Spirit of Bandung in the fight against US imperialism it is important to ask whether such a unified voice of opposition really existed and – more importantly – whether it really challenged the US empire.

While the denunciation of US imperialism at Bandung is often attributed to Indonesia’s first President, Sukarno, he made no direct criticism of the US at the time. In his opening address to the Conference delegates, Sukarno warned of a resurgent colonialism in ‘its modern dress’,5 but remained preoccupied with colonialism of the old order. The only explicit reference to a new imperialism at the Conference was made by Brigadier-General Carlos P. Romulo, Special and Personal Envoy of the President of the Philippines to the US, who warned of ‘a new super–barbarism, a new super–imperialism,
a new super-power.’ Yet this ‘new super-imperialism’ imposed by a system
that was ‘inherently expansionist’ referred not to US capitalism, but to Soviet
and Chinese Communism.6 Similarly, the delegations of Turkey, Iran, Iraq,
Pakistan and Sri Lanka defended US foreign policy and denounced China’s
support for Communist insurgency overseas. Mahmoud Muntasser, head of
the Libyan delegation, alluded to external ideological threats posing ‘a danger
menacing the sovereignty of nations’ that was ‘more dangerous and of much
stronger effect’ than colonialism since it embodied ‘all the disadvantages of
classical colonialism, and, in addition, intellectual slavery.’7 Mohammad
Fadhil Jamali, leading the Iraqi delegation, identified Communism as one of
‘three international forces’ threatening world peace after ‘old-time colo-
nialism’ and Zionism. Describing Communism as ‘a subversive religion’, he
said that it threatened ‘a new form of colonialism, much deadlier than the old
one.’8 In this context references in the Final Communiqué of the Asian-
African Conference to ‘abstention from interference in the internal affairs of
one country by another’ must be understood not only as a response to old
and new forms of colonialism, but also to Communist expansionism.9 Chou
En-lai, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of
China, was forced to abandon his prepared speech and instead appealed to
Conference delegates to disregard distinctions between Communists and
nationalists.10

Far from representing a united front against racism, neo-colonialism and
imperialism, the Bandung Conference was characterized by divisiveness and
conflict within Asia and Africa that not only undermined the ability of Third
World nationalists to contest the US empire, but reaffirmed the legitimacy
of US imperial ambitions. In the nationalist condemnation of the ‘new super-
imperialism’ by Thailand’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Prince Wan
Bongsprabandh, the ‘threat of infiltration and subversion, if not aggression
itself’ was used to rally support for the use of military aggression against North
Vietnam (and in the same speech Buddhist texts were quoted at length to
give ideological legitimacy to the use of military force).11 It was in this
context that Thailand’s Minister for Foreign Affairs also conveyed US
President Eisenhower’s ‘greetings’ to the Bandung Conference – a message
that was interpreted as both measured consent and a veiled warning.12

The presence of the US state at Bandung – expressed through those states
already operating within its informal imperial network (particularly Thailand,
the Philippines and South Vietnam) – is inseparable from the historical legacy
of the Bandung Conference. Within a decade the US would use this impe-
rial network to escalate its military aggression against Vietnam and support
a military coup in Indonesia. Six months after Sukarno’s celebration of the
10th anniversary of the Bandung Conference under the banner of ‘never
retreat’, US-trained military leaders deposed Sukarno and orchestrated the massacre of more than a million people who were members or alleged members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). The site of the Bandung Conference, Gedung Merdeka (Freedom Hall), became a military command center and hundreds of local PKI leaders and those accused of PKI sympathies were imprisoned in its basement, where they were tortured and killed.

That Sukarno himself was in many ways unprepared for this had to do with the same ambiguities that were present at the Bandung Conference. His passion for neologisms had produced the term NEKOLIM (neo-colonialism, colonialism, imperialism) – a term that tended to deny the contradictions and fundamental differences within these systems of global power. It was at once a useful political slogan and useless theoretical tool. It lacked the historical and political subtleties and theoretical insights needed to inform political action. The use of neologisms and slogans to simplify concepts and dissolve capitalism’s complexities and contradictions led Sukarno to articulate radical anti-imperialist positions without any reference to class or capitalism. Sukarno’s Left nationalism not only saw the primary struggle as one between nations, but through the ideology of ‘Marhaenism’ (national self-reliance) that accompanied NEKOLIM, it also denied the relevance of class struggle within Indonesia.

Notably, Sukarno also conflated pre-1945 colonialism with imperialism after the war, effectively obscuring the emergence of a new and unique American informal empire. Frustration with Sukarno’s worldview was expressed by the revolutionary writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, in his speech to the Lekra Congress in Palembang in March 1964. Emphasizing the centrality of US imperialism, Pram advanced an indirect criticism of Sukarno’s narrow concern with the reinstallation of British colonialism in Malaysia:

> Drag those ‘Malaysian’ neo-colonialists by their ears and put them in the defendant’s seat. Pull off their mask and you’ll see the true face of British imperialism with all its greed. But don’t stop there. Pull off this mask too, and you’ll see the truest face: US imperialism.

Pointing to the new locus of power in the world, Pram observed that ‘without US imperialism, other imperialisms will fall like leaves’. Yet it is precisely because NEKOLIM obscured the intricacies and dynamics of the new imperialism that Sukarno continued to target former and new colonial powers equally, responding primarily to formal modes of empire.

It was only with the escalation of US military aggression in Vietnam that Sukarno focused more directly on US imperialism (although this did not
necessarily mean a clearer understanding). For its part, the US fully recognized that overt military intervention in Indonesia would be viewed as an act of formal empire. American officials were concerned that their actions would be labelled as a case of NEKOLIM and that this would expose their role in supporting the military coup. Ironically, it was precisely because the new kind of imperial power they exercised was qualitatively different from colonial power that they could be relatively confident of being able to hide their role and protect their interests. Political alliances secured through military training programs and the promise of arms shipments via countries already integrated into the US empire in the region (particularly Thailand and the Philippines) escaped the NEKOLIM label. This demonstrated precisely why colonialism and the new imperialism should not have been conflated by their opponents. It was through its confidence in the informal imperial alignment, especially military and security ‘inter-service relationships’, that the US government was able to provide the Indonesian army with ‘shooting lists’ naming thousands of PKI leaders and organizers. A perceived threat to American imperial interests was thus eradicated – a pattern that would be repeated for the next fifty years and continues to this day.

Five decades after Bandung, the paradoxical reaffirmation of US imperial interests by Third World nationalists was re-enacted by Thailand’s Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, who used the ‘Spirit of Bandung’ to launch a new regional formation, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), in June 2002. In his speech to the inaugural meeting of the ACD in northern Thailand, Thaksin described the new regional initiative as ‘a confidence-building process for Asian countries, a confidence that is to be built upon the Spirit of Bandung’. Thaksin emphasized the need to promote this ‘Asian consciousness’ by quoting at length a marketing book on corporate branding. But the most remarkable aspect of this revival of the ‘Spirit of Bandung’ was the way in which Thaksin sought to add legitimacy to the ACD by citing its prior approval by the US President and the President of the European Commission:

I met with them and informed them about the ACD initiative even before it was finalized. I was delighted that both leaders fully understood and concurred with me about the importance of strengthening our regional cooperation.

Just as Thailand’s Minister for Foreign Affairs conveyed the US President’s ‘greetings’ to the Bandung Conference in 1955, this invocation of US approval in 2002 once again serves as a reminder of where imperial power really lies.

Stripping away the myth from the reality of the ‘Spirit of Bandung’ is not
merely a necessary exercise in historical revision. It is also important because this myth reproduced in nationalist forms of anti-globalization politics that reinforce rather than contest the US empire today. This is especially clear in Thailand and Indonesia. Using the example of ruling-class appropriation of anti-IMF populism in Thailand, I argue that the reorganization of the Thai state on a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) model represents part of a wider process, i.e. the making of an ‘interior’ bourgeoisie and the transnationalization of domestic capital from within the ‘Third World’. This is illustrated by the strategies of the transnational agri-food conglomerate, Charoen Pokphand, and its role in the CEO-based reconstitution of the Thai state as part of a process of alignment with the US imperial state. Making sense of this requires a critical understanding of the interior bourgeoisie and challenges the distinction between ‘national’ and ‘foreign’ capital implicit in Left nationalist responses to globalization.

The essay then goes on to examine the limits of ‘localism’ and ‘localization’ in anti-globalization movement struggles. The ‘defence of the local’ runs the risk of appropriation and re-deployment by nationalist politicians and, especially, the interior bourgeoisie, and thus may contribute to countering and undermining working-class militancy. After examining recent developments from this perspective in Thailand, the essay concludes by returning to Indonesia and the ‘Spirit of Bandung’ to show how Sukarno’s ideology of ‘Marhaenism’ is being used to contain radicalism and channel popular resistance in ways that deploy the rhetoric of anti-capitalism without challenging capitalism. Important parallels may be seen between its combination of community and self-reliance and the alternatives advocated by some segments of the anti-globalization movements. While these alternatives differ in substance, they share the rhetoric of self-reliance and defence of community interests and may be appropriated and re-deployed by ruling-class interests seeking to utilize popular discontent with globalization in ways that legitimate and reinforce their own integration into global capitalism and the American empire.

NATIONALISM AND THE LEFT IN THAILAND

While the mass mobilizations that occurred in response to the Asian economic crisis of 1997-98 broadened the base of anti-globalization movements, the revolutionary potential of these protests and their limitations remain subjects of debate among activists. What these movements did show was the primacy of nationalism as the reference point for popular discontent with globalization, whether understood primarily in liberal terms as corporate globalization or in more radical terms as capitalist globalization or imperialism. Across a broad political spectrum, the IMF emerged as both
symbol and source of the injustice and social devastation wrought by the crisis and its aftermath. According to many activists and academics on the Left, the crisis was engineered by the IMF to extend its domination over the countries in this region. In Thailand one of the most important Left critiques to enter the public debate on the causes and consequences of the crisis are the *Globalization Series* and *Local Knowledge Series* of the *Visions Project*. These series of publications condemn the IMF and World Bank as agents of US imperialism, while advocating localizing alternatives to the prevailing world order.23

Writing under the penname Yuk Si-ariya,24 the Director of the Visions Project, Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, explains the crisis of Thai capitalism using a world-systems framework, locating globalization as part of the hegemonic project of the US imperial state. Tienchai argues that former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai assisted the expansion of US hegemony in the 1990s by seeking US government support and declaring loyalty to the IMF. Tienchai’s concern with the loss of national pride leads him to place greater emphasis on Thailand’s ‘begging’ for US assistance and the imposition of American culture than on the political economy of American power. According to Tienchai, this ‘loyalty to the IMF’ contrasts with the disobedience of Malaysia and Indonesia, who ‘were acting like the recalcitrant children of the IMF’.25 Tienchai contends that, like its Southeast Asian neighbours, Thailand should have developed ‘an independent strategy and standpoint’ from which it could negotiate with the US, thereby challenging US hegemony and limiting the damage done by the IMF. Whether Thailand could have done this remains unexplored – a weakness exacerbated by Tienchai’s emphasis on Chuan’s failure as a national leader rather than offering a critical understanding of the neoliberal regime and ruling-class interests in Thailand. Furthermore, the central concept of US hegemony is largely dealt with in institutional and pseudo-cultural terms, with US hegemonic ambitions rooted in a ‘wild west’ culture of expansionism and domination, without reference to capitalism or any obvious capitalist imperative.26

The desire for an independent strategy to emerge from a correct set of policy choices, unrelated to the structural power and interests of capital, is a recurring weakness in the Visions Project. Insofar as capital is incorporated into the analysis at all, it is premised on a foreign-national dichotomy according to which national capital becomes virtually synonymous with the nation.27 This is partly due to the treatment of capitalism in Thailand as underdeveloped or peripheral, operating within the inter-imperialist rivalry of Japan, China and the US. According to Tienchai: ‘The deeper the crisis in Thailand and Asia in the future, the more Asian countries, especially
Japanese capitalists, China and the NICs [Newly Industrializing Countries] will lose.' He concludes that: ‘The end result will be that American capitalists will enter and buy up assets at rock bottom prices and at the same time the American state will expand its influence, replacing China and Japan.'

The underlying assumption is that Thai capitalism, operating within the sphere of Asian-regional capitalism, existed outside the US empire prior to the Asian crisis and was subjected to imperial realignment only through the US state’s use of the IMF to impose neoliberal restructuring and financial liberalization. Such an ahistorical approach ignores far-reaching US geopolitical and economic involvement in the reshaping of the Thai state and Thai capitalism in the decades prior to the economic boom of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Well before Chuan went begging cap in hand to the US, the military regime of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, who took power in the coup of 1958, reconstituted the Thai state as part of its integration into the American empire. Under what Peter Bell describes as the US role in the Thai ‘nation-building’ process, the US government was directly involved in creating major state agencies such as Thailand’s Budget Bureau, National Statistical Office, National Economic Development Board, and Board of Investment. This facilitated an influx of US capital that was further reinforced by Thailand’s role as a strategic military and economic base for US imperialist aggression against Vietnam. Thus, while some historians interpret Sarit’s political project as a process of making the state more ‘Thai’, a more accurate interpretation is that the Sarit coup ‘brought into line the strategic interests of the US, the dictatorial aims of the Thai military, and the commercial ambitions of domestic capital.’ The US military and economic support for the Sarit dictatorship and the direct role of US agencies in reorganizing the Thai state signalled an early phase of imperial alignment.

In the absence of this historical context, Tienchai’s analysis of US imperialism tends to present the Thai ruling class as devoid of strategic interests and the capitalist class as seemingly relegated to comprador status. Capitalists in Thailand appear to have no stake in the globalization project overseen by the US imperial state and are driven to support globalization only due to an ideological shift imposed under US hegemony. Tienchai subsequently argues that ‘as a theory and strategy’ globalization ‘has played a direct role in gearing the Thai ruling class and Thai technocrats to believe in currency liberalization and stock market deregulation, liberalization of information and entertainment, which will bring disaster to all Thai people.’ Such an argument neglects the process by which capitalists in Thailand and other Asian countries renegotiated, domesticated and redeployed neoliberal ideology as part of their own class strategies directed at working-class militancy. The class
strategy of domestic capital is precisely to utilize neoliberalism to undermine working-class power, while at the same time using populist nationalism to mobilize working-class discontent against the IMF.

Ultimately Tienchai’s analysis depicts globalization as a strategy of class war between the capitalists of the US, Germany and Japan (although China is a global power in his analysis, Tienchai avoids attributing it with a capitalist class), a class war that does not involve working classes at all. Conforming with the dominant liberal and Left view expressed by NGOs and social movements, the working class are viewed only as victims of globalization and victims of the crisis. The prevailing orthodoxy in social movements, NGOs and the intellectual Left is to deny the role of working-class struggle in forcing capital ‘to develop strategies of control and containment’, thereby avoiding any risk that workers may be ‘blamed’ for the crisis. As Ji Giles Ungpakorn, a founding member of Workers’ Democracy in Thailand, has argued:

The dominant ideological response among organized workers and Left-wing intellectuals to the crisis, and the manner in which governments handled economic policy, was in the form of Left Nationalism. This ideology is a mirror image of ruling class nationalism and a sign of the current ideological weakness of the Thai Left.

‘THE THIRD TEXAN’: ANTI-IMF POPULISM AND THE CEO STATE

This convergence of Left nationalism and ruling-class nationalism is illustrated by the anti-IMF populism utilized by the Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) Party in its electoral victory and in Prime Minister Thaksin’s attacks on the IMF. In a televised address to the nation on 31 July 2003, Thaksin announced that the final instalment of Thailand’s debt to the IMF – incurred at the time of the Asian economic crisis – had been paid. Describing the damage done to Thailand by IMF policies imposed through loan conditionality, Thaksin congratulated Thai citizens on this ‘victory’ for the people and declared that: ‘We shall never go back to the days of the IMF again as long as I am in office.’ This nationalist stance illustrated precisely the anti-IMF sentiment mobilized by the Left and utilized by the Right to bring Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai to power two years earlier.

A week after his anti-IMF speech Thaksin permitted the CIA to arrest an Indonesian national, Riduan Isamuddin (Hambali), in Thailand for suspected terrorist activities links to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). Hambali was already in US custody outside of Thailand when Bush made the announcement of his arrest and the US$10 million dollar reward, and only afterwards did Thaksin make
his own announcement to the Thai public – an act that led Thai human rights groups to accuse Thaksin of turning the country into a ‘US colony’. The real reward came in October at the APEC Summit, when Bush praised Thaksin for his ‘good work’ in capturing Hambali and announced that Thailand would be given ‘major non-NATO ally status’ – which includes access to depleted uranium anti-tank rounds and US government loan guarantees for private banks financing arms exports.\(^{39}\) This nexus of free trade and state terror was further demonstrated by the commitment to finalize a US-Thai Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as yet another reward for Thailand’s role in the exercise of US imperial power. Indeed, Thaksin’s address to the US-ASEAN Business Council in Washington in December 2001 aptly summarized Thailand’s role in the informal empire: ‘Throughout the colonial era, the global wars of the 20th century, and the conflicts within Asia, Thailand and the United States have remained close friends and allies. That will not change in the dawn of the 21st century.’\(^{40}\)

The identification of the populist-nationalist Thai leader with the US empire is symbolized by Thaksin’s response to receipt of the Sam Houston Humanitarian Award in October 2002 at Sam Houston State University in Texas, where he gained his doctorate in criminal justice in the late 1970s.\(^{41}\) Referring to the fact that James Baker III and former President George Bush were recipients of the award in earlier years, Thaksin declared that:

> Although I am the first Asian to get the award, you may count me as the third Texan. I consider myself a Texan – at least in spirit.\(^{42}\)

In many respects this mix of Texas-trained police commander and billionaire corporate CEO turned Prime Minister encapsulates precisely the nexus of US imperial power in the region, with Thailand as deputy sheriff and an internationally-integrated site of capitalist accumulation. However, to ensure the continuity of his regime the Third Texan must maintain political legitimacy through a nationalist agenda that at times appears to challenge US interests. While this may appeal to Left nationalists in Thailand who see potential for challenging US hegemony, the situation is far more complex. As Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin have argued, the hegemonic power of the US empire does not necessarily entail ‘a transfer of direct popular loyalty to the American state itself.’ In fact, ‘the greatest danger to it is that the states within its orbit will be rendered illegitimate by virtue of their articulation to the imperium.’\(^{43}\) In this sense, the Thaksin regime’s nationalism, particularly its appropriation of anti-IMF populism, plays an important role in maintaining its legitimacy. Whereas Left nationalists have set aside discussion of capitalism in favour of US imperialism, the Thaksin regime clearly extends nationalist ideological legitimation to the capitalist system itself. In his anti-
IMF speech, for example, Thaksin reiterated the inseparability of capitalism and nationalism: ‘I have said on many occasions that under the capitalist and democratic systems, there is one common element among all the successful capitalist countries, that is, a sense of nationalism.’

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Thai Rak Thai Party’s ascent to power in 2001 was its ability to draw into its ranks prominent figures from NGOs and social movements, as well as former Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) cadres. Once again nationalism plays a central role in explaining how ex-CPT cadres could end up joining a political party led by Thaksin, one of the wealthiest capitalists in the country. As Ji Giles Ungpakorn observes:

On the one hand, the vast majority of ex-CPT sympathizers firmly believed that socialism died along with the Cold War and therefore they have managed to put their beliefs behind them. On the other hand, those who still believed in some form of socialist society were just as comfortable working alongside a party run by nationalist businessmen as those who no longer believed in socialism. This is because the Stalinist politics of the CPT always emphasized the importance of nationalism and class alliances with ‘progressive capitalists’ over and above class struggle, especially in (what the CPT called) ‘the national stage’ of the Thai revolution.

These broad political alliances enabled Thai Rak Thai to channel nationalist sentiment into a comprehensive political project aimed at radically reorganizing the state to better serve the interests of ‘progressive capitalists’. Central to this is the Thaksin regime’s establishment of the corporate Chief Executive Officer (CEO) model of governance as the basis for running the country. As a former CEO of his own telecommunications conglomerate, Shin Corporation, Thaksin has aggressively promoted himself not as Prime Minister of a country, but as CEO of Thailand Inc. A crucial element of this strategic reorientation of state institutions under the CEO model is the reconstitution of provincial governments, with the establishment of ‘CEO Governors’ in 30 provinces. This was widely seen as a consolidation of Thaksin’s own power, bypassing key segments of the state bureaucracy. As Weerayut Chokchaimadon has argued:

[T]he CEO arrangement gives power to each governor to interfere in activities of local administrative bodies – tambon (sub-district) and provincial organizations, and municipalities. From now on, these bodies will not have the local autonomy and freedom of thought to devise programmes based on local knowledge and needs. The governors will decide what must be done and how, based on national goals drawn up by Thaksin and his people … Thaksin even ordered all
ministries to change rules to aid these governors in asserting their power. The governors now control the money, which used to be allocated by the ministries. They can reshuffle personnel. They can now run their local anti-drug and anti-mafia campaigns, not the central government. This appears to be decentralization, but with Thaksin pulling all the strings in Bangkok, the plan shoves aside the bureaucracy.46

Weerayut concludes that Thaksin is treating Thailand as ‘just another company’ and since ‘Thaksin didn’t run Shin Corp as a democracy’, neither will he run the country democratically.47 While criticisms such as those expounded by Weerayut expose the authoritarian ambitions of Thaksin and point to the political and ethical shortcomings of the CEO governor model, there is a tendency to neglect the transformative effect of CEO-ization on the state and the particular interests it serves. The CEO-ization of the state is a form of flexible decentralization that consolidates central control over the provinces through a harmonized local state management system. At the same time it enforces competition between the provinces for new injections of capital.

This model is explicitly based on the corporate strategies of the agribusiness conglomerate Charoen Pokphand (CP), which uses intra-firm trade and competition to increase productivity, maximize profits and maintain flexible centralized control. This application of CP’s corporate structure to the state coincides with the relocation of capital within Thailand and the financialization of agriculture, intensifying the compulsion for provinces to compete against each other. As Pasuk Phongpaichit has argued, a key aspect of the CEO model promoted by Thaksin is ‘broadening and deepening the extent of the domestic capitalist economy’.48 In this context, Pasuk quotes Thaksin’s assertion that: ‘Capitalism needs capital, without which there is no capitalism. We need to push capital into the rural areas.’49 For corporations like CP, this expansion into rural areas is facilitated by the use of its own CEO governance structures by state regulatory authorities and enables the implementation of its export-oriented agri-food strategy. This is based on CP’s nationalistic vision of Thailand as the ‘Kitchen of the World’, now entrenched as one of the most important economic policies of the Thai state.

The role of the Thaksin regime in supporting the accumulation strategies of individual capitals such as CP is further illustrated by its orchestration of a cover-up and manipulation of the avian influenza (H5N1) outbreak in 2003-04. Despite a potentially serious threat to the legitimacy of the Thaksin regime, government officials refused to recognize the outbreak of H5N1 in Thailand in an effort to protect the poultry export industry and therefore the interests of CP. With 1.6 billion broiler chicks sold each year and control of
a highly profitable chicken feed industry, CP’s interests were threatened by the avian flu pandemic already recognized in neighbouring Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and southern China. As the outbreak worsened, the government turned the crisis into an opportunity for CP by attributing the source of the epidemic to small-scale farming. The closed systems of large-scale factory farming used by CP and its contract farmers were promoted as a solution. Forestalling a serious impact on CP’s poultry business, the government moved to replace small farmers with CP’s closed factory farms, boosting the corporation’s control over poultry production and chicken feed, and increasing its sale of broiler chicks in the domestic market.

The dominance of CP in rural Thailand is increasingly matched by its urban presence, as the owner of Lotus supermarkets and 7-Eleven convenience stores, and its global power. Although its name is relatively unknown, CP is the largest supplier of animal feed in the world and the fifth largest agri-food corporation, operating over 300 companies in twenty countries. Ranked among Forbes magazine’s annual list of dollar billionaires, the CEO of CP, Dhanin Chearavanont, exercises extensive political influence in securing the corporation’s overseas interests. As a major investor in animal feed, agrochemicals, food processing, motorcycles, seeds and supermarkets in China, Dhanin maintains close ties with the political leadership in Beijing. Similar ties are maintained with the Bush family, including the hiring of former President Bush Sr. as a consultant, and the creation of joint venture businesses with Neil Bush, the brother of George W. Bush. CP also made political donations to both the Republican and Democratic parties in the US to encourage support for China’s WTO accession. At the time of the 2000 presidential elections in the US, the Executive Vice President of CP, Sarasin Viraphol, was quoted in the Beijing People’s Daily as saying that Thailand’s interests would be better served by a Bush administration, especially by its stance on free trade and China.

The reorganization of the state through CP’s CEO model also illustrates the privatization of the functions of the state. In his book on The Asian CEO, Korsak Chairasmisak, Vice Chairman and Chairman of the Executive Board of Directors of CP and CEO of 7-Eleven, points out that CP’s 7-Eleven chain convenience stores were the main outlet for public distribution in Bangkok of the draft Constitution of 1997. Faced with the legal requirement that the draft Constitution be made available to the public within forty-five days, it was determined that 7-Eleven stores, with two million customers a day, had greater access to the public than any state agency. It was of course in CP’s interests to ensure the smooth passage of the new Constitution since it was no less than ‘a charter for Thailand’s modern capitalists.’ This rela-
tionship to the state is set to continue, as the CEO-ization of the state brings government agencies even closer to the management and operational mode of 7-Eleven stores. For Korsak this forms the basis of the future of local, national and global governance:

I myself have a vision of the contemporary world being led by 1,000 or so largest corporations spreading their branches all over the world. These corporations will have a lot of influence on socio-economic policy of many countries as well as on the life of ordinary people.\(^{58}\)

In describing the political process of achieving this vision, Korsak suggests that CEO-ization is primarily concerned with the realignment and concentration of political and economic power. Describing elected politicians as having ‘symbolic meaning’, and using the case of Japan, Korsak states that:

[All that the Prime Minister can do is persuade his country’s businessmen to increase investment. Whether or not an investment is made, and how much it will be, the final decision is with the CEO of the enterprise in question. The CEO is the one who has been given a mandate to ‘act’ for people from other societies. The CEO has been entrusted with the control and management of world productive resources, such as manpower, capital and technology. The CEO, as a result, comes to possess tremendous power to direct the trend of our world.\(^{59}\)]

In a commentary published in *Matichon Weekly* in March 2004, a leading progressive academic, Nidhi Aeosrivongse, raises a series of questions about a ‘new nationalism’ taking shape in Thailand under globalization, linking this to the CEO transformation of the national polity.\(^{60}\) While posing the question of whose interests are served by this new nationalism, Nidhi observes that global competitiveness is now used to define the nationalist credentials of a Thai corporation, a change that is reshaping ‘the spirit of Thai nationalism’. Devoid of historical or cultural roots and geared solely towards what appears to be a singularly corporate victory in the global arena, this new nationalism raises serious questions including, Nidhi adds, whether there is in fact any ‘nation’ involved in this new nationalism.\(^{61}\)

Arguments by critics of the Thaksin regime such as Nidhi tend to support the view that the populist nationalism that brought Thaksin to power is being remade under the Thaksin regime. Yet *why* this is taking place, and the broader political and economic context of these changes, remain unclear. Whether it is the remaking of populist nationalism or the imposition of the CEO model, it seems necessary to move the analysis beyond institutions, policies and political personalities to understand the social conflict and structures of power underpinning these changes. For this we
need to situate corporate strategies and political processes within an understanding of class struggle, capitalism and the dynamics of the American empire.

NATIONALISM AND THE INTERIOR BOURGEOISIE

The construction of a new nationalism rooted in a CEO model of governance is much more than an authoritarian grab for power in the interests of big business. It constitutes a deliberate strategy to undercut working-class power by further internationalizing domestic capital, deepening capitalist expansion internally, and reorganizing the state to be a more effective agent of that capital. It is in this sense a class strategy, undertaken not only in the interests of fractions of domestic capital seeking deeper integration into global circuits of capital, but against the struggle of the subordinate classes to contain the reach of capitalist accumulation and set barriers to the maximization of profit. It is precisely because the subordinate classes are engaged in struggles that challenge ruling-class interests that a populist nationalism (combined with selective political repression) is necessary. Just as the Third Texan must rail against the IMF to maintain the current political regime, the CEO-based reorganization of the state and the advancement of the interests of fractions of capital (exemplified by transnational conglomerates like CP), must continue to be framed in a nationalism that recognizes and supports ‘progressive capitalists.’

The experience of Thailand suggests that class strategies of ‘nationalist’ capitalists are inseparable from Left responses to globalization and imperialism that invoke a nationalist defence of ‘domestic’ or ‘national’ capital. The particular anti-globalization alternatives informed by this kind of nationalism implicitly rely on a national bourgeoisie that should and can contribute to the struggle against US imperialism. It seems that this ideological position can only be maintained by assuming a continuation of classical imperialism and denying the political and social realities of the new imperial order, particularly the internationalization of capital in the ‘Third World’.

Two ideological blind spots in particular have important implications for political action (or inaction). The first concerns the apparent paradox of a domestic capitalist class at once nationalistic and internationalizing. The second concerns the implicit belief that the domestic capitalist class still constitutes a ‘national’ bourgeoisie, and that globalization – as Tienchai argues – is essentially a class war between capitalists in the advanced capitalist countries. The fallacies of these positions cannot be countered by labelling these nationalist capitalists and their state representatives as nothing more than comprador capitalists abusing popular anti-globalization sentiment. Even less useful are moral judgments about the fabrications of these nationalists. Such
contradictions are inherent in the very nature of capitalist classes and the class strategies they employ. As Nicos Poulantzas noted, ‘There can be no doubt that bourgeois policy vis-à-vis the nation is subject to the hazards of its particular interests: indeed, the history of the bourgeoisie is one of continual oscillation between identification with and betrayal of the nation.’62

It is when the bourgeoisie oscillates towards identification with the nation that we find a convergence with certain kinds of anti-globalization nationalism; an alliance that seeks to defend the national bourgeoisie against the neoliberal policies of the IMF and US hegemony. However, rather than being victims of global capital, sections of the ‘national’ bourgeoisie are themselves able to internationalize, becoming transnational capital without becoming foreign-owned or dominated. Yet this change also means that their material interests become inextricably tied to those of the American empire and are systemically represented by the US imperial state. In other words, if domestic capital internationalizes and emulates the logic of global capital, then it requires the US imperial state to pursue its role in managing global capitalism. It also requires international capital to be internalized within every other state – a process involving what Panitch and Gindin refer to as ‘the reconstitution of states as integral elements of an informal American empire’.63

Viewed in these terms, the radical reorganization of the Thai state through the CEO-ization model may be understood as a class strategy to remake the state in a way that better serves the interests of transnationalized fractions of domestic capital, and at the same time functions more effectively vis-à-vis the US imperial state. This may explain why individual capitals represented by transnational conglomerates such as CP pay tribute to the US state and seek both direct and indirect forms of representation to it. These forms of representation differ from institutional linkages with other states because only the US state is viewed in global terms. As we noted in the previous section, CP executives explicitly tied their interests to the US state not because of their investments in the US, but because of investments in China. Through its strategic alliances and joint ventures with transnational corporations like the US-based agribusiness transnational, Monsanto, and the UK-based global retailer, Tesco, CP has also internalized the interests and accumulation patterns of specific fractions of international capital. In this way, the interests of nationalist fractions of domestic capital are inextricably bound up with the US imperial state’s effective management of global capitalism.

To make sense of this nationalistic, transnationalized domestic capitalist class that defends the nation and aligns itself with the American imperial order, it is important to recognize the social changes that have remade the national bourgeoisie into an ‘interior’ bourgeoisie. In his overview of Poulantzas’ concept of the interior bourgeoisie, Bob Jessop explains that:
This ‘interior’ bourgeoisie is neither totally dependent on foreign capital – as is the comprador bourgeoisie, which lacks its own base of accumulation and is economically, politically, and ideologically subordinated. Nor is the ‘interior’ bourgeoisie sufficiently independent to play a leading role in any genuine anti-imperialist struggle (as is the national bourgeoisie). This intermediate position does not mean that the interior bourgeoisie lacks all measure of independence. On the contrary it has its own economic foundation and bases of accumulation at home and abroad and it still exhibits its own specific, national political and ideological orientations in opposition to American capital.⁶⁴

This suggests two critical dimensions of the interior bourgeoisie: integration with, but not dependency on, circuits of foreign capital, and possession of ‘its own economic foundation and bases of accumulation at home and abroad’. Although Poulantzas applied the concept of the interior bourgeoisie to advanced capitalist countries, the explanatory power of this concept may be useful in developing a more critical understanding of transnationalized fractions of domestic capital originating within ‘developing’ capitalist countries today.⁶⁵ The fractions of capital represented by CP, for example, clearly have their own economic foundations and bases of accumulation at home and abroad, while at the same time they are integrated into circuits of global capital. What this suggests is that the internationalization of capital (accelerated under the globalization project) does not simply produce a dependency of ‘national’ capital on ‘foreign’ capital, but involves a more complex process that includes the internationalization of domestic capital and the ‘localization’ of foreign capital. What appears as ‘national’ capital operates according to the logic of global capital, in its own interests, and without the bonds of dependency that characterize the comprador capitalists under classical imperialism.

Proponents of Left nationalism and localization especially tend to underestimate the extent to which the financialization of industrial capital has transformed the ‘national’ bourgeoisie. The assumption that financial markets and finance capital flows operate in separate spheres from production and circuits of manufacturing capital permits a nationalist identification with domestic manufacturing capital. What this suggests is that while certain industries, such as telecommunications and finance, are understood to be globally integrated, domestic manufacturing and agribusiness are seen as more clearly divided between foreign and local control. But this fails to recognize the way in which the financialization of industrial production and agriculture has transformed the patterns and boundaries of accumulation. Rather than being an intrusive force, international finance capital may in fact be internalized within domestic capital.
As a conceptual tool the concept of the interior bourgeoisie helps unravel the apparently paradoxical policies, strategies and actions of the state and fractions of domestic capital. More importantly, it suggests that the struggle by domestic capital against US hegemony (epitomized by resistance to the neoliberal project of the IMF) is a struggle within US hegemony, not against it. While neoliberal policies do threaten the interests of particular fractions of domestic capital, they also form part of the transformative pressures that remake some segments of the domestic capitalist class as an interior bourgeoisie. What this means is that ‘nationalist’ resistance of domestic capitalists to neoliberal integration into global circuits of capital is in fact a struggle to secure better terms for integration. Moreover, it involves an internal reorganization to emulate global capital more effectively. Against this background the mobilizational politics of nationalism forms part of a class strategy to reinvent the bourgeoisie as an interior bourgeoisie, whose internationalization of capital requires a more effective national state that gives it access to the US imperial state. Thus nationalist resistance may occur within the process of imperial (re)alignment.

THE LIMITS OF LOCALIZATION

It is increasingly clear that a more critical approach to ‘localization’ as an alternative to capitalist globalization is needed. The ‘local knowledge’ alternatives advocated by the Visions Project, for example, focus exclusively on the threat posed by ‘foreign’ capital, and look to ‘local’ capital to defend national interests. This in turn generates implicit support for the capitalist imperative of competition against foreign capital as a more effective means of defending local culture from imperial domination. An example of this is the position articulated in the Vision Project’s Local Knowledge Series regarding the domestication of the genetic mapping and engineering of rice. This is seen as necessary in order to protect local rice varieties and to compete internationally as a rice-exporting nation. Yet this ‘alternative’ neglects the role that genetic engineering plays in the commodification of living organisms – a process integral to the very logic of capitalism.

The broader relevance of this for anti-globalization movements lies in the fact that capitalism appropriates the defence of the ‘local’ as a means of re-legitimating itself. This is epitomized by the solidaristic call by Korsak Chairasmisak, the CP executive and 7-Eleven CEO cited earlier, for Thai family shopkeepers to become owners of a 7-Eleven convenience store as a means of resisting the pressures of transnational corporations: ‘We will support them to become strong enough to withstand competition from foreign multinational corporations who have begun to cast an eye on Thailand’s retail business.’ The fact that 7-Eleven (headquartered in Texas
with 26,000 stores in 18 countries) is itself a multinational corporation is obscured, as it is reinvented as a local company challenging the interests of foreign multinationals. This is indicative of the challenges posed by the localization strategies of international capital. Given this challenge, it also serves as a sobering reminder to those activists advocating local alternatives to globalization and/or US imperialism that localization strategies should be rooted in a more coherent class analysis. In the absence of class analysis, and with the persistence of the false dichotomy of ‘foreign versus national’ capital, the radical defence of the local risks incorporation into capitalist localization strategies – class strategies that will fragment or demobilize popular resistance.

The limits of localization are even more apparent when proponents of globalization and supporters of the US empire are themselves advocating localization. A leading public intellectual and policy advisor, Chai-anan Samudavanija (who was the first to translate the term ‘globalization’ into the Thai language), states unequivocally that

America needs a Global Strategy for the age of globalization. Such a global strategy must be able to address the basic strategic objective that defines the American Agenda.69

This, he maintains, would benefit Thailand, insofar as its interests would be represented in the American Agenda. Yet at the same time Chai-anan shares with many Left-liberal academics and activists a belief in localization as a means of promoting ‘the empowerment of individuals, decentralization and participation’, thereby counter-balancing the social and economic impact of globalization and a shift in political power, where ‘transnational operations replace the state in controlling and directing economic activities at all levels’ and ‘elites – political, military and technocratic – lose their most fundamental power over the private sector, namely their regulative authority.’70 This leads Chai-anan to depict the rise of transnational power in a way that converges with the neo-Marxist Visions Project, where globalization has ‘empowered international regimes such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund’ which then used the Asian economic crisis ‘to lay down conditions and guidelines for economic recovery.’71

The significance of Chai-anan’s synthesis of localization and globalization within the US imperial order is not the appropriation of political ideas, but the way in which this translates into political action. As mass labour protests against the privatization of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) escalated in the first quarter of 2004, with 50,000 workers taking to the streets on 3 March, Chai-anan was brought in by the Thaksin government as the new chairperson of EGAT to negotiate a settlement with the
union. Depicted in the media as someone who ‘wears the same shirt’ as the workers,\textsuperscript{72} Chai-anan attempted to appease the unions by agreeing to halt the privatization of EGAT. Confusion followed as the unions declared victory against privatization while Thaksin reaffirmed that privatization would go ahead. Chai-anan immediately denied that there was an agreement to stop the privatization and claimed that an alternative process of gradual privatization was formulated. In response, the EGAT union continued its protests and threatened strike action.

The struggle over EGAT privatization demonstrates an important political dynamic in the resistance to the Thaksin regime’s neoliberal agenda, and signifies an important break in the ruling class use of populist-nationalism. When Thaksin declared a people’s victory in his anti-IMF speech in July 2003, he asserted that Thailand’s freedom from ‘binding obligations’ to the IMF signified an end to the forced privatization of state enterprises to repay national debt. Yet in the same speech he reaffirmed that privatization would proceed through \textit{national} means, by listing these public utilities on the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET). The listing of public service utilities on the stock exchange would ensure that ‘accountability can be monitored by the capital markets’ and that they would emulate capitalist enterprises in the private sector.\textsuperscript{73} Through this shift the Thaksin regime attempted to contain workers’ resistance to privatization within the parameters of anti-IMF nationalism, and by removing the IMF from this equation he believed that resistance would dissolve. It was very significant in this context that the workers’ unions and labour groups saw through this and recognized the continuity of the neoliberal project within the Thaksin regime’s nationalist agenda, and responded with organized mass protests against continued privatization through SET listings. In this sense the anti-privatization movement offers renewed possibilities to break from the Left nationalism that characterized the responses to the Asian crisis, broadening the struggle beyond anti-IMF nationalism and targeting the specific ruling-class strategies that seek to co-opt or marginalize working-class militancy.\textsuperscript{74}

Despite such possibilities, for this to become a major challenge to global capitalism and American empire, the interconnections between globalization, corporate domination, racism, capitalism and imperialism need to become coherent elements of a worldview central to the collective understanding of a mass movement and its aspirations, not merely slogans to march under. The relationship between alternative globalization, anti-globalization and anti-imperialist movements and populist nationalism is often based on broad coalitions, tactical alliances that seek to use nationalism – rooted in discontent with the global status quo and the sense of vulnerability and insecurity associated with globalization – to gain support for more radical responses.
Regardless of the ideological justification (where ‘pragmatism’ seems to be the most pervasive), the strategic implication of appeals to national sovereignty, self-sufficiency, self-reliance and so forth is essentially the same. Such a narrow understanding of the US imperial order in terms of economic domination (expressed in terms of US transnational corporations) risks advocating alternatives that reinforce the logic of capitalism and therefore supporting the very system the US imperial state is managing. More importantly, it risks mobilizing working-class people in ways that promote the very kind of populist nationalism that capitalists are using to negotiate the terms of their imperial assimilation.

BACK TO BANDUNG:
THE SUBSTANCE OF SLOGANS

Perhaps nowhere in Asia is this seen more clearly today than in Indonesia where, as with the anti-IMF mobilizations in Thailand, there is massive anger and frustration over the vulnerability and uncertainty generated by accelerated globalization and intensified US military aggression. Yet this popular anger and frustration is also subject to being managed and utilized by ruling-class interests.

Among the twenty-four political parties contesting the July 2004 elections in Indonesia, no less than six laid claim to the legacy of Sukarno, including three separate political parties led by his daughters Megawati, Rachmawati and Sukmawati. The reinvention of Sukarnoism as a nationalist political programme included the revival of a key element in the political mythology of Sukarno, founded on the legendary meeting of Sukarno and the peasant-farmer, Marhaen, that gave rise to his doctrine of ‘Marhaenism’, or self-reliance. The denial of class struggle was one of the primary ideological goals of Sukarno’s invention of Marhaenism, premised on his rejection of the Marxist concept of the proletariat as inappropriate to the Indonesian context. According to Sukarno, Marhaen was ‘not a member of the proletariat, for he does not sell his [sic] labour-power to another without participating in the ownership of the means of production.’ Therefore Indonesia did not have a working class, but had a mass of ‘destitute people’ who owned the means of production but still lived in poverty. This ideological shift was not simply a matter of redefining class struggle in terms of the ‘little people’ or ‘the destitute people’ of Indonesia. Marhaenism identified them as the nation, effectively defining class struggle out of the equation.

In rallying public support for her party (now called the Indonesian Nationalist Party Marhaenisme), Sukmawati Sukarno reasserted the relevance of Marhaenism in the 21st century in the context of globalization but was unable to define its contemporary meaning or explain the specific social and
economic policies that it would entail. Like Sukarnoism more generally, Marhaenism is being used for its symbolic power, channelling popular discontent into support for ruling-class nationalism. This strategy for managing the discontented masses extends to the more progressive versions of Marhaenism, epitomized by the Partai Nasional Bung Karno (PNBK, Brother Karno National Party) created in 2002. Renamed Partai Nasional Banteng Kemerdekaan (Freedom Bull National Party) to meet legal requirements banning the use of personal names in the 2004 elections, PNBK advocated ‘progressive revolution’ based on the ideology of Marhaenism and the advancement of ‘Indonesian socialism’. As with other nationalist political parties, no clear economic agenda for achieving self-reliance was presented, let alone a vision of ‘socialism.’ Rather, social democratic reforms (social welfare and subsidies) were offered to the masses in the hope of tapping the populist nationalism generated by larger political parties like Megawati’s PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party).

As a mobilization strategy used by fractions of the Indonesian ruling class, Marhaenism offers significant potential because its lack of substance is combined with a broad reach across the political spectrum. Radically interpreted as a domesticated Marxism appropriate to Indonesia, Marhaenism also informs Left nationalist responses to globalization and US imperialism. Doctrinal legitimacy for these radical interpretations is found in the Marhaen Declaration of 1964, which added an overt anti-capitalist line to its populist nationalism, calling for the removal of landowners and capitalists from the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI). Although the purge never materialized, this anti-capitalist rhetoric plays an important role in binding Marhaenism to anti-imperialist and anti-globalization positions today. According to Mohammad Samsul Arifin, ‘The genuine Marhaenist says, as long as there are practices of imperialism, colonialism and feudalism in the world, this doctrine remains relevant.’ The power of Marhaenism, it is argued, is that while it shares a revolutionary agenda with Marxism, the latter focuses on the working class while Marhaenism ‘widens its constituency to almost all people in the community’. Thus a revolutionary agenda is asserted, but without class or class struggle. The radical anti-globalization and anti-imperialist struggle is – once again – perceived as a struggle of nations. Susilo Eko Prayitno, a member of the presidium of the Indonesian National Student Movement (Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasional Indonesia, GMNI) describes Marhaenism as a Marxist theory ‘born in the struggle to abolish capitalism, colonialism and imperialism’. Notably, GMNI was among a dozen student organizations that held mass protests in Jakarta in February 2003 to advocate ‘Tritura’, the ‘three demands of the people’, including the reduction of prices, the prosecution of corrupt politicians, and ‘building a self-reliant
nation’. It is this last demand that is perceived as a Marhaenist response to capitalist globalization and US imperialism.

Just as the distinctions between US imperialism and pre-1945 European colonialism were blurred by Sukarno’s slogans, in which colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism and neo-imperialism were used interchangeably and without concern for either historical specificities or the political-economic dynamic of these systems of global domination, so today does the juxtaposition of neoliberalism, globalization, capitalism and imperialism (preceded by ‘no!’ or ‘down with!’) fail to enhance our understanding and chart a clear path for collective action. In the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis, mass mobilizations against the WTO and IMF have frequently invoked the kind of populist nationalism that attributes all social, economic and cultural ills to the institutions that police the global order while depicting the nation as the victim. Such an approach radicalizes the discourse of liberal Left responses to globalization but without making the necessary shift in political analysis or moving towards the kinds of revolutionary collective action required.

In a statement published in *Pembebasan* (Liberation), the monthly publication of the Central Leadership Committee of the People’s Democratic Party (KPP-PRD), imperialism is associated with colonialism and ‘blatant colonization’ in ways that tend to obscure US empire rather than providing critical understanding and reference points for action:

We are currently faced with a picture of a world that is in motion, culminating in a clash between imperialism against its enemies. Make no mistake, the demands of capitalist development up until this most recent stage (imperialism), require that they plunder the world’s wealth, by what ever means – ferociously and blatantly. The occupation (colonization) of Afghanistan, then Iraq, adds to the series of subject countries, or countries subjected to fulfill the needs of imperialism. But the backlash and resistance to this – in its various forms – is an objective law that they also cannot deny. Exploitation by international corporations is immediately followed by resistance against it; their consolidation in a number of world forums (the IMF, WTO, World Bank, World Economic Forum and so on) is constantly blockaded by demonstrators who oppose them.84

Disregarding the broad political spectrum that characterizes the anti-corporate populism and lesser anti-capitalist sentiment of these demonstrations, the KPP-PRD concludes that victory is assured: ‘Over time this link in the chain of world colonialism will be evermore weakened by crisis, and the resistance it faces.’85

In a statement issued two months earlier, the KPP-PRD referred to the way in which ‘the interests of global imperialism’ are served through the debt
trap in the Third World. It is ‘the global imperialists’ who ‘will force these nations to open up their domestic markets through the WTO thus making it possible for the capital of global imperialism to control and take over, one by one, the assets of these nations.’\textsuperscript{86} Thus the concept of imperialism is not used to explain the dynamics of global capitalism, but to add radical language to NGO and social movement concerns with corporate control and Third World debt. A common assumption underlies it: the nation, not class, lies at the heart of this struggle. This radical critique of imperialism, divorced as it is from class struggle, cannot be seen as inherently anti-capitalist.

The roots of such radical nationalism and anti-imperialism are far more complex than contemporary social movements often recognize. When the anti-colonialist mass organization, Serikat Islam, was radicalized towards the end of 1917, concerns expressed by local merchant capitalists prompted its leadership to clarify that the object of opposition was ‘sinful capitalism’, by which was meant foreign capitalism.\textsuperscript{87} A quarter of a century later, faced with the prospect of losing the war and an indefinite Allied occupation of Indonesia that could facilitate European re-colonization, Japanese naval intelligence forces in Java created a school for Indonesian nationalists in October 1944 called \textit{Asrama Indonesia Merdeka} (Dormitory of Free Indonesia). With the appointment of a radical nationalist connected with the underground PKI as its head, the school was dedicated to teaching Marxism-Leninism and ‘students were taught to see Indonesia’s fight for independence in terms of an international struggle against capitalist imperialism.’\textsuperscript{88} Thus classes on Lenin’s theory of imperialism were held under the auspices of the Japanese Imperial Navy! These examples are offered only to indicate some of the historical specificities and complexities of both imperialism and anti-imperialism. It is precisely the tendency to de-historicize globalization and imperialism that leads to a dangerous over-simplification of the challenges we face today, prescribing political action that is based more on slogans than substance.

The fact that the concept of ‘imperialism’ has been revived within anti-globalization movements in one sense presents new possibilities for a shift from anti-corporate populism to anti-capitalism. However, it is necessary to question whether specific events – notably US military aggression against Iraq – have led activists merely to graft anti-war and anti-Bush sentiments onto the anti-globalization movement’s critique of transnational corporate control, producing the right set of slogans but with little substance. The use of the term ‘US imperialism’ does not in itself indicate any significant radicalization of the anti-globalization and anti-war movements. The ‘Bush + Bombs + Big Corporations = US IMPERIALISM’ formula may serve an immediate political purpose, but it may also diminish the possibility of understanding the
deeper roots of US imperialism, blending liberal assumptions with revolutionary language in ways that undermine strategies of resistance.

Certainly in Southeast Asia today we see the concept of US imperialism being used as a means of identifying capitalism as foreign, thereby obscuring domestic capitalism and the material interests and class strategies of ‘local’ capitalists who are thus able to identify themselves with the nation. Similarly, the use of the idea of self-sufficiency in a reinvented Sukarnoism threatens to appropriate the demands of the anti-globalization food sovereignty movement. This presents severe political risks for the Left. It threatens to occupy and de-radicalize critical social spaces of resistance by reinventing the division between foreign and local capitalisms and defending local capitalists. If the target is the logo, then an image shift is often sufficient to answer those demands. Thus even the cultural symbols of globalization and US domination (variously seen as Americanization and ‘cultural’ imperialism) can be localized. As a McDonald’s restaurant poster in Indonesia reads: ‘In the name of Allah, the merciful and the gracious, McDonald’s Indonesia is owned by an indigenous Muslim Indonesian.’

NOTES

This essay began in Bandung and ended in Bangkok, and during the course of this journey numerous people provided crucial support and advice. In particular, I wish to express my gratitude to Varoonvarn Svangsopakul for her invaluable assistance with translation from the Thai language. Thanks also to Awang Awaludin and Gody Utama for their assistance in Bandung, and Greg Albo and Peter Rossman for providing critical references. Of course, the views expressed here and any errors are solely my own.

3 Throughout the essay I refer to both globalization and US imperialism when discussing the targets of opposition of resistance movements and Left activists. This distinction is needed to reflect the variations across the broad Left, where opponents of US imperialism are not necessarily opposed to global capitalism and where resistance to globalization does not automatically translate into direct opposition to US imperialism. In my own view, globalization and neoliberalism are specific political projects under the aegis of the American empire to facilitate expansion of global capitalism and break working-class power. They are class strategies, and are not systems in and of themselves.

4 Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Foreign and Military Intelligence, Book 4, Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Government
Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (US Senate), April, 1976, p. 133. Quoted in William Blum, *The CIA: A Forgotten History – US Global Interventions Since World War 2*, London and New York, Zed Books, 1986, p. 108. In a fascinating note on this, Blum discusses evidence concerning CIA involvement in the bombing of a chartered Air India plane transporting members of the Chinese delegation to the Bandung Conference. It is also interesting to note that the current Bandung Conference Museum in Merdeka Hall, Bandung, includes photographs and a brief explanation of the tragedy, including photographs of the timing device used in the bombing, but makes no reference to possible US involvement.

5 ‘Address by the President of Indonesia’, Centre for the Study of Asian-African and Developing Studies, *Collected Documents of the Asian-African Conference, 18-24 April, 1955*, Jakarta: Agency for Research and Development, The Department of Foreign Affairs, 1983, p. 7. It should be noted that while Sukarno addressed the Conference in an opening speech, he did not formally attend the meeting. It was actually on the 10th anniversary of the Bandung Conference in April 1965 that he famously pronounced those who thought imperialism dead to be ‘madmen’ and proclaimed: ‘Imperialism is not yet dead, the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism is not yet over!’


15 In 1966 Sukarno announced before the US Congress: ‘May God give us, America and Indonesia, the best friendship which has ever existed between two nations.’ This speech is recorded in archival video footage reproduced in the documentary film, *Mass Grave*, Lexy Junior Rambadeta & Off Stream, 2001.

17 Ibid.

18 As Edward Masters, who served at the US Embassy from 1964-68, pointed out: ‘We were in effect public enemy number one at that time. We had replaced the British.’ See the interview in the documentary, Shadow Play: Indonesia’s Years of Living Dangerously, Thirteen/WNET, 2002.

19 The US Department of State sent a telegram to the US embassy in Jakarta reminding them that it is ‘essential that we not give Sukarno and company opportunity claim that they [are]about to be attacked by NEKOLIM and that we not give Subandrio and the PKI citable public evidence that USG [US Government] supports Army against them.’ The telegram then states unequivocally that: ‘Army clearly needs no material assistance from us at this point’, and goes on to explain that the informal imperial network of the US was sufficient, since years of Indonesian-US ‘inter-service relationships’ developed through military training programs, security and economic linkages ‘should have established clearly in minds [of] Army leaders that US stands behind them if they should need help.’ ‘Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Indonesia’, Washington, 6 October, 1965. National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, Central Files 1964-66, POL 23-9 INDON. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xxvi/4445.htm.


21 As a wealthy Southeast Asian capitalist nominated 1992 ASEAN Businessman of the Year, Thaksin was seen as the most appropriate host for the inauguration of the ACD, and has emerged as a ‘model’ leader among ruling classes in the region.


24 As Craig Reynolds explains, the penname Tienchai uses implies ‘a dream of a better Thailand’ based on ‘the epochal “Yuk Si-ariya” or “Age of the Mettaya Buddha”, the Buddha who is to be reborn in this world long after the religion of Gautama Buddha has come to an end. The saving message of Dhamma will again right the world after the upheavals of the Age of Darkness, the Kaliyuga.’ Ibid.

25 Yuk Si-Ariya, ‘American Imperialism and the War to Usurp Hegemony’, in


27 It might be argued that Tienchai’s theoretical approach suffers from what Richard Bryan describes as ‘the neo-marxist adherence to a nationalist taxonomy of capital’ that leads to a false dichotomy of foreign and national capital, and an inability to perceive ‘the contradiction within the internationalization of capital.’ Richard Bryan, ‘The State and the Internationalization of Capital: An Approach to Analysis’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 17(3), 1987, p. 256.

28 Si-ariya, ‘American Imperialism and the War to Usurp Hegemony’, p. 53.


30 Thak Chaleomtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1979, pp. 140-141. Sarit gave prominence to a perceived Chinese Communist threat, and his chief adviser, Luang Vichit’s study on Thai races depicted Communism as ‘un-Thai’, with the ideological-racial nexus of Communism and ethnicity excluding the possibility for Thai to be Communists.


32 Sarit’s loyalty to the US empire was satirized in Khamsing Srinawk’s ‘The Peasant and the White Man’, where a peasant farmer’s dog – old Somrit (bronze) – is taken away by a white man who promises to train Somrit as an obedient guard dog. This parodies Sarit’s return from the Walter Reed hospital in the US. In the story, the dog returns alienated from the peasant farmer, refusing to eat simple food. The farmer has to feed him better food and dress himself better to please the dog, but Somrit – forgetting who raised him – turns and bites his master. Khamsing Srinawk, ‘The Peasant and the White Man’, in *The Politician and Other Stories*, Third Edition, Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2001, pp. 70-80.


38 ‘Repayment of the Final Instalment of Thailand’s Debt under the IMF Programme’, Speech by Thaksin Shinawatra, Prime Minister of Thailand, Government House, Bangkok, 31 July, 2003.
39 The Thaksin regime further escalated the US-led ‘War on Terror’ by massacring 108 Muslims in the southern city of Pattani on April 28, 2004, including the execution of 32 people who had sought refuge inside the 400-year-old Mosque.
40 Quoted in The Nation (Bangkok), 28 February, 2004. This quote was used in an article concerning Thaksin’s angry response to a US State Department report on human rights violations in Thailand. In his response Thaksin declared that such criticism rendered the US ‘a useless friend’.
41 Not long after receiving this award for ‘notable contributions to humanity’ and ‘empowerment of others toward equality for humankind’, Thaksin authorized a ‘war on drugs’ that gave legitimacy to greater police violence and led to more than 2,500 deaths in a few months.
44 ‘Repayment of the Final Instalment of Thailand’s Debt under the IMF Programme’, Speech by Thaksin Shinawatra, Prime Minister of Thailand, Government House, Bangkok, 31 July, 2003.
47 Ibid.
48 Pasuk Phongpaichit, ‘A Country is a Company, a PM is a CEO’, Seminar on Statesman or Manager? Image and Reality of Leadership in Southeast Asia, Centre for Political Economy, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2 April, 2004.
49 Ibid.
50 Chanida Chanyapate and Isabelle Delforge, ‘The Politics of Bird Flu in Thailand’, Focus on Trade, No. 98, April, 2004. The intervention by the Vision Project’s Tienchai Wongchaisuwan in the debate on the avian flu crisis in Thailand manifests the same shortcomings that his neo-marxist analysis of the Asian crisis entails. Again writing under the pen name Yuk Si-ariya in a regular column in Matichon Weekly (Issues 1229–31, March, 2004), he addresses the issues of H5N1 and biotechnology not in the context of capitalism, but in terms of ‘chaos’; and while alluding to the government
cover-up ‘benefiting exporting companies’ and the ‘deception concerning the closed farming system’, he ignores the strategies of capital (not least CP’s) and their relationship to the Thai state.

This includes 106 feed mills in China employing 60,000 workers.

CP’s investment license in China is Number 0001, indicating the early move into China under the name of Chia Tai. In April 2003, twenty-one workers at a Chia Tai poultry processing plant in Shandong Province died in a fire that exposed the brutal labour regime imposed by CP in its factories in China. Workers were ordered to remain at their posts during the fire and several died there, more fearful of punishment by the factory managers than the fire itself. See ‘Twenty-One Lives Lost in 5 April Blaze at the Qingdao Zhengda Food Factory’, China Labour Bulletin, 12 April, 2003.

Dan E. Moldea and David Corn, ‘Influence Peddling, Bush Style’, The Nation (US), 23 October, 2000. As a series of newspaper reports (and full page advertisements by CP’s telecommunications subsidiary) in the Thai press show, CP hosted former President Bush visit to Thailand in January 1994 after his visit to China, providing the context for calls for a softer US stance on China and promotion of China’s WTO accession.


‘Thailand Benefits From Bush’s Policies if He Wins in Election’, The People’s Daily (Beijing), 10 November, 2000. These interests are now articulated through the head ‘CEO Ambassador’ based in Washington who is directly answerable to Thaksin as CEO of the country.

Korsak Chairasmisak, The Asian CEO in Action, Bangkok: Post Books/DMG Books, 2003, p. 140. Another example of 7-Eleven undertaking state functions is the use of stores across the country by the Ministry of Commerce to distribute price-controlled supplies of sugar during a critical shortage.


Ibid., pp. 43-44.


Bob Jessop, Nicos Poulantzas: Marxist Theory and Political Strategy, London:

Anut Aphaphirom et al., *Teknoloyi patiwat lok su sangkhom khwamru lae yangyum* (Technology Transforms the World: Towards the Knowledge Society and Sustainable Society), Bangkok, Witthithat Project, 2000, pp. 180–82. Cited in Reynolds, ‘Thai Identity in the Age of Globalization’, p. 325. This localizing alternative is easily susceptible to appropriation by CP as a ‘national’ company that is rapidly establishing its dominance in Thailand’s rice production and trade, while expanding its strategic partnership with Monsanto – the world’s largest genetic engineering corporation. Moreover, it is a long-term strategy of Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer CropScience and other agro-chemical/genetic engineering corporations to undermine opposition to genetically modified (GM) crops by first introducing GM rice varieties through national research institutes in Asia, then enforcing farmers’ dependency on patented seeds and pesticides in later stages. See Varoonvarn Svangsopakul, ‘Monsanto Offers False Promises’, *The Nation* (Bangkok), 29 November, 2003.


Globalization was first translated into Thai by Chai-Anan Samudavanija who used the word *lokanuwat*, although it ‘came to be synonymous with the concept of unbridled, often unethical, opportunism.’ Following the intervention of the Royal Institute of Thailand the word *lokaphiwat* was established as a more appropriate translation. Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand’s Boom and Bust*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1998, p. 55; Reynolds, ‘Thai Identity in the Age of Globalization’, pp. 317–18.


69 Ibid., pp. 191–192; 194.

67 Emphasis in the original. Ibid., p. 199.

70 Ibid., p. 199.


73 A reversion to nationalism was apparent when union leaders declared the wave of go-slows and strikes launched on 28 April as ‘patriotic leave from work’.

74 It is still debated whether Sukarno really met a peasant-farmer called Marhaen. Some argue that Marhaen is merely the term for ‘peasant’ in Sundanese – the language used in the region where the meeting was supposed to have taken place.


78 ‘In the name of Bung Karno’, *Tempo*, No.15/IV, 16–22 December, 2003.
81 Ibid.
82 Susilo Eko Prayitno, ‘Marhaenisme dan Membangun Dunia Baru (Marhaenism and Developing a New World)’, April, 2003.
83 Notably this Tritura originates in the ‘three demands of the people’ in the military-coordinated anti-Communist protests in the 1960s, calling for a ban on the PKI, the purging of PKI members from the Cabinet and lower prices.
84 ‘Build the Power of the Poor to Resist the Colonialists’ Invasion’, Pembebasan (Liberation), No. 7, April, 2003.
85 Emphasis added. Ibid.
88 Ibid., pp. 116-117.
89 For the use of ‘McDonaldization’ to connote a ‘cultural massive attack against local cultures’, which unfortunately but rather typically leaves the economic dimensions less clearly understood, see I. Wibowo, ‘Globalisasi dan Kapitalisme Global (Globalization and Global Capitalism)’, Kompas, 27 April, 2002.